

OSCE Balancing Act

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Just as Kazakhstan is engaged in a geostrategic balancing act between Russian and Western influences, it is now also responsible for pursuing parity between Russian and Western goals at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe summit in Astana in December.

To be effective, the summit should not sideline any existing security organization, legitimize any country's special interests, or undermine existing European security treaties. To avoid failure, the summit should not seek to forge an overambitious European security pact as proposed by President Dmitry Medvedev. This would simply create confusion without contributing anything to international security. Instead, member states should recommit to the core OSCE values: democracy, national sovereignty and international cooperation.

A tug of war between Russian and Western approaches has developed ahead of the OSCE summit. Officials in Moscow have revived the notion of reforming the organization in line with their foreign policy goals. Their proposals include eviscerating the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, or ODIHR, expanding the authority of the OSCE Permanent Council, where Russia holds veto power, and raising the OSCE's security stature in order to

reduce NATO's. In sum, the Kremlin is expecting the Kazakh government to endorse Medvedev's proposal for a rapid European security architecture whose chief purpose is to restrict U.S. influence.

The U.S. approach is markedly different to Russia's. Washington seeks to develop the OSCE into a more effective confidence builder in the wider European and Eurasian arenas where domestic or international security remain brittle, especially in parts of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

As OSCE chair, Kazakhstan has made strenuous efforts to develop the organization and enhance its effectiveness, particularly in responding to crises such as the one in Kyrgyzstan. But it is hamstrung by the consensus principle, by the OSCE's slender resources and by competing Western and Russian positions on the role of the organization. While it will seek to avoid alienating any OSCE member, Astana will need to formulate a summit agenda that can sufficiently attract all major member states and from which all will ultimately benefit. Such an agenda must encompass four key components.

First, the OSCE needs to take stock of what it has actually accomplished in enhancing international security as well as honestly detailing its shortcomings and inadequacies. This will help develop a level of consensus on the organization's future direction. Second, the OSCE can make a significant contribution in Afghanistan to supplement the NATO combat and reconstruction mission. Third, in dealing with unresolved separatist conflicts in the former Soviet Union, the Astana summit could undertake specific initiatives, such as seeking to establish or consolidate OSCE missions in conflict zones and emphasizing the observance of the principle of host-country-consent to the stationing of foreign troops on their territories. Finally, the OSCE participating states must recommit to the principles of the Helsinki Act in the human dimension and develop a strategy for strengthening the rule of law and ensuring freedom of the media throughout the OSCE region, while the ODIHR mandate should not be weakened.

Kazakhstan is especially well-positioned to deliver on these four components in Central Asia during and beyond its OSCE chairmanship.

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